

Eight Taliban captured in Viper search



Sgt. Trey Economidy, 2nd Platoon leader, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C., secures a Taliban member captured in the village of Kalata, Sunday. Several were apprehended as Operation Viper concluded in the Baghni Valley.

Story and photos by Spc. Jim Wagner
109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KALATA, Afghanistan — In a village U.S. Army planners didn't know existed, the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C., found one of their biggest successes of Operation Viper — capturing eight known or suspected Taliban and a clutch of weapons and ammunition Sunday.

Rerouting their landing zone to the east after finding a village occupying the planned landing zone, CH-47 Chinooks dropped paratroopers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Abn. Div., who immediately set up an assembly point and sent three platoons out on patrol.

No more than two hours later, 2nd Plt., had detained the first two Taliban.

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Army Reservist fills Bagram's optometry gap

Story and photos by
Pvt. 2 Terri Rorke
11th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — Some come in because they get debris in their eyes from aircraft, some from the windy air of Bagram and others from injuries in the field.

Whatever the reason, Maj. Brian Montgomery, optometrist, 8th Field Hospital, Fort Story, Va., is on call for aid to eyes.

The Army Reserve major arrived here with his assistant, Spc. Brian Huxford, optical lab specialist, a reservist with the 5502nd Army Hospital, Aurora, Colo., and is currently the only Army

optometrist on the base.

For about three months, Bagram's hospital did not have an optometrist. Montgomery received a call right before Thanksgiving letting him know he would be deployed here. He was unsure if he would get to spend Christmas with his family, but three weeks after the initial phone call, he received orders to arrive late January.

When Montgomery arrived Jan. 30, soldiers were now in luck if they needed a change in medication or eye glass repair.

They are still fortunate, because the major is always on call

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Optometrist, Maj. Brian Montgomery, 18th Field Hospital, Fort Story, Va., checks a patient's eyes before concluding a diagnosis here Monday.

World News (Compiled from CNN.com)

U.S. orders 24 long-range bombers to Guam

WASHINGTON — Twenty-four bombers will begin moving from bases in the United States to Guam as part of a planned beefing up of U.S. military forces in the Pacific to send a “message” to North Korea, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

The move is part of the U.S. Pacific Command’s effort to maintain a robust military presence around the Korean Peninsula while forces are being built up in the Persian Gulf region. Officials say they intend to send a nonthreatening message to North Korea not to take advantage of the Iraqi situation and assume the U.S. military is distracted.

The deployment order for the bombers had long been planned and is not related to last weekend’s intercept of an Air Force reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan by four North Korean MiG fighters, officials said.

It is not clear how soon the bombers will deploy.

Twelve B-1 bombers and 12 B-52 bombers received deployment orders Saturday. It was not immediately clear where the deployed B-1s are based, or whether the B-52s would come from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota or Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

The Pentagon issued this statement in connection with the deployment:

“As part of our global efforts to address worldwide requirements, we are deploying additional forces to the Western Pacific as U.S. forces are preparing for possible military action elsewhere in the world. These moves are not aggressive in nature. Deploying these additional forces is a prudent measure to bolster our defensive posture and as a deterrent. As the President has said, we are seeking a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the international community’s concerns over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.”

The United States said last month that North Korea had reactivated its five-megawatt nuclear reactor, a sign that Pyongyang might be going ahead with its nuclear weapons program.

Sources: U.S. may consider abandoning second resolution

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration has not ruled out abandoning plans for a vote on a second U.N. resolution on Iraq if its clear defeat is imminent, senior administration officials said Tuesday.

Despite intensive lobbying, the United States has not secured the nine votes it needs, along with an absence of any vetoes from the other four permanent Security Council member nations. Those veto-holding countries are France, China, Russia and Great Britain, the only U.S. ally on this issue among the five permanent members.

If the United States proceeds with plans to call for a vote, officials said they would pursue it next week after top weapons inspectors Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei report Friday on Iraqi disarmament.

But Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said Tuesday that Moscow would oppose the new resolution and use its veto power if necessary.

“Russia has this right, and if the situation so demands, Russia will of course use its right of veto — as an extreme measure — to avoid the worst development of the situation,” Ivanov said in a translated version of a BBC World Service interview in London.

Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan repeated his plea Tuesday to give the inspection process more time, particularly in light of Iraq’s start over the weekend on destruction of Al Samoud 2 missiles.

Al-Qaida names match those under U.S. surveillance

WASHINGTON — About a dozen names discovered at the house where al-Qaida operations chief Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was arrested match names of individuals under surveillance in the United States, U.S. government officials told CNN Tuesday.

Officials stressed the preliminary nature of the information, and cautioned that the numbers are likely to change — and the names will require further investigation.

One official emphasized that even though some names match, it does not mean arrests are imminent.

“There may be intelligence value in continuing the surveillance,” the government official said. “Also, just because you find a name that would indicate possible links to al-Qaida doesn’t mean you have the sufficient basis for making an arrest.”

Officials have said hundreds of names were found in the Rawalpindi, Pakistan, home where Mohammed was captured Saturday.

Many were found in a computer, while others were found on pieces of paper. Authorities are investigating to see just how many might be connected to al-Qaida.

Referring to Mohammed’s arrest, President Bush said in a speech Tuesday, “the man who masterminded the Sept. 11 attacks is no longer a problem to the United States of America.”



A left main landing gear tire from the space shuttle Columbia

Shuttle tires may have blown out

CNN — Tires and debris recovered from the space shuttle Columbia suggest that the left tires blew out and superheated gases were flowing out of the left wing’s wheel well, investigators said Tuesday.

The independent board looking into what brought down the doomed orbiter cautioned that the new evidence, while tantalizing, leaves many questions unanswered.

“We believe that it’s possible that the tires on the left side blew out,” said Roger Tetrault, a member of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board.

“The blowout of the tires would have been a very catastrophic event.”



Sgt. Brian Houston, a team leader in Company A, records serial numbers from weapons confiscated during a search Sunday in the village of Kalata. The company confiscated nine weapons during the patrol and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

Above: Paratroopers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C., guard a compound being searched Sunday.

Left: 2nd Platoon paratroopers call in a suspected weapons cache during a patrol Sunday north of the village of Kalata. Operation Viper concluded Monday.

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The results were nothing less than expected for the conclusion of Operation Viper, which started to the west in Baghran Valley two weeks ago and ended in Baghni Valley Monday.

“We didn’t have a lot of intel coming (into Baghni Valley), but based on the last couple of weeks of operations in the Baghran Valley, we were expecting Taliban,” said 1st Sgt. Jimmy Carabello, Company A first sergeant.

Operation Viper kicked off two weeks ago — a coalition effort to deny sanctuary to the Taliban, anti-coalition and al-Qaida forces in the area — after intelligence reported forces gathering in the Baghran Valley.

According to Carabello, those initial patrols flushed them out of the valley and into the Baghni Valley. Since then,

Taliban forces have been in hiding and trying to regroup.

“They don’t want to fight us as a group, so they’re blending into the community,” Carabello said.

Searching for Taliban forces in a community of Afghans requires vehicle and compound searches, a time-consuming effort that can take days for a company to complete.

While searching the compounds on the west end of Kalata, paratroopers on the defensive perimeter searched vehicles, and people who were walking in the area.

At one such area, Company A’s second platoon found two AK-47s in a truck with four Afghans.

When asked why they had the automatic weapons, one of the Afghans said they were district police, a vague explanation that “Sent up a red flag right away,” said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Mercer, platoon sergeant, 2nd Plt., Company A, 2/504th PIR.

All their names were taken down while two were brought in for further questioning at the assembly area. The other two were released.

Intelligence soon confirmed the four as known Taliban.

The two were detained and in a pre-dawn raid, the other two were apprehended at the compound where the truck was parked. Two other suspects were also detained.

“The mission out here was a huge success,” said Staff Sgt. Guillermo Ravelo, fire support sergeant, Company A, 2/504th PIR. “Any time you get eight PUCs (persons under control), that’s a good thing.”

Also taken in the village searches were nine weapons — two World War II-era Russian weapons, five AK-47s and two British Enfield .308-caliber rifles — and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

The mission’s success in the Baghni Valley was the culmination of the company’s efforts during Operation Viper, said Carabello.

“These guys are seeing the fruits of their labor,” he said. “I’m real proud of what they’ve done here.”

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for everything from fabricating glasses to providing emergency care.

Montgomery said he has already seen more than 100 walk-ins.

Since there is a lack of awareness of his presence, Montgomery usually teaches Huxford a thing or two about optometry while he waits for patients so that one day Huxford can perform more of the care on patients.

If the two are not studying optometry, they are on a run or watching movies.

Montgomery operates during sick call hours, 0330-1030Z and there is usually no wait.

"It is not as busy as we would like it to be," he said.

Despite the fact that the family man is away from his two daughters, his son and his wife Tracy, he said he is enjoying his time here because the experience lets him get to know all sorts of people.

"Getting to work with the people here and also helping them," is the best part of the job, said Montgomery.

The doctor always knew he would be an optometrist. In sixth grade, his school had a career day and the presentation on optometry prompted his interest.

Years later he looked at colleges with his mother and that is when he knew for sure he would be an optometrist.

He enlisted for four years in the National Guard and received a scholarship, which he followed by serving as an Army reservist.

Today, the 15-year military veteran works for the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Chillicothe, Ohio when he is not working for the Army.



Optometrist Maj. Brian Montgomery writes prescriptions aiding soldiers suffering from everything from irritating dust to field injuries.

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

1530Z at the MWR building: "Mission: Impossible 2." IMF agent Ethan Hunt has been sent on a mission to retrieve and destroy the supply of a genetically created disease called "Chimera." He is not the only person after samples of the disease; a gang of international terrorists has already managed to steal the cure called "Bellerophon." Tomorrow's movie will be "Any Given Sunday."



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Thursday
Bagram:	Partly cloudy H: 52F L: 27F	Partly cloudy H: 54F L: 32F
Kandahar:	Mostly clear H: 57F L: 30F	Clear H: 68F L: 39F
Kabul:	Haze H: 50F L: 28F	Haze H: 54F L: 28F
Uzbekistan:	Mostly cloudy H: 55F L: 28F	Mostly cloudy H: 58F L: 38F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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CJTF-180 Commander —

Lt. Gen. Dan McNeill

CJTF-180 Command Sergeant Major —

Command Sgt. Maj. Steven R. England

Public Affairs Officer —

Col. Roger King

Public Affairs Sergeant Major —

Master Sgt. Kelly Tyler

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Commander — Maj. William Mott

NCOIC — Staff Sgt. Christina Bhatti

Editor — Sgt. W. Cullen James

Journalists — Pfc. Christina Carde,

Pfc. Debralee P. Crankshaw, Pvt. 2 Terri Rorke

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To be added to the daily distribution list email william.james@us.army.mil



Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from *ESPN.com*)

Sterling won't pay big money for coach

ESPN — Take a second to imagine all that raw talent on the Clippers' roster being handed to the best free-agent coach on the market this summer.

That's right.

Jeff Van Gundy.

Now forget that was ever suggested.

There's no point dwelling too long on the intoxicating prospect of Van Gundy teaching the Clippers' kiddies how to play, or anyone from that coaching class, because owner Donald T. Sterling is not going to pay for that sort of hire. There are perpetual whispers about Pat Riley or Larry Brown being lured back to L.A. — assuming, of course, they got divorced from their current teams — but the reality of Sterling's stewardship renders those ideas fantasies, too.

Sterling is loathe to spend on his free agents and isn't willing to burn any of his considerable profits on the guy who decides who plays. All of which explains why Dennis Johnson, named Monday as the interim replacement for the fired Alvin Gentry, actually has a chance to stick beyond the final 23 games of the club's latest lost-at-sea season.

It's probably not a great chance, given that DJ was beaten out



Dennis Johnson, who lost out on the Clippers job in 2000, could be at the helm in '03-04.

for the job by Gentry in the summer of 2000. It's also true that a 24-game stint isn't much time to prove oneself, because the Clippers long since lost touch with a legitimate playoff run. We might have learned more about DJ's readiness had the change come, say, at the All-Star break.

Yet it's still more likely that Johnson will be coaching the Clippers next season compared to any of the established bench men who will be looking for work this summer. Your Mike Dunleavys and Mike Fratellos, in other words.

Jordan to be evaluated Wednesday

WASHINGTON —

Michael Jordan left the Washington Wizards' game against Toronto with back spasms Tuesday night and did not return.

Jordan will be evaluated Wednesday, and coach Doug Collins said it will be a game-time decision to determine whether Jordan will play in that night's home game against the Los Angeles Clippers. Jordan hasn't missed a game this season.



Jordan left in the second quarter after scoring four points in 15 minutes.

Jordan appeared to hurt himself when he

twisted his body just before making a pass near the free-throw line in the second quarter.

He stumbled as he started to run downcourt and left the game during the next stoppage of play, with 4:34 left in the period.

Jordan put his hand on his lower back as he walked into the tunnel toward the locker room. He scored four points in 15 minutes.

The Wizards had their biggest lead, 40-33, when Jordan left the game, but the Raptors rallied to win 89-86.

Jordan left before the locker room was opened to reporters after the game, and he wasn't available for comment.

Ironically, this was supposed to be Jordan's 40th birthday game, which had been scheduled for Feb. 17. It was postponed because of a snowstorm.

"That's how fate works," Collins said. "We shouldn't even have been playing."



2002 NBA standings

Eastern Conference

Atlantic

(2) New Jersey	38-23
(4) Philadelphia	34-25
(5) Boston	34-26
(7) Orlando	31-30
Washington	29-31

Central

(1) Indiana	38-21
(3) Detroit	38-23
(6) New Orleans	35-27
(8) Milwaukee	30-30
Atlanta	23-38

Western Conference

Midwest

(1) Dallas	46-14
(3) San Antonio	41-18
(5) Minnesota	40-21
(6) Utah	34-25
Houston	30-30

Pacific

(2) Sacramento	42-19
(4) Portland	39-20
(7) L.A. Lakers	32-26
(8) Phoenix	32-28
Golden State	29-30



SPORTS, from Page 5

NBA facing pre-Olympic drug testing

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — NBA players on Olympic teams will face out-of-competition, random drug tests for the 2004 Athens Games starting July 1 as part of a global program that is expected to be approved Wednesday.

Under the system, which applies to athletes in all Olympic sports, drug testers can show up unannounced at a player's house at any time to ask for a sample.

This is the first time NBA stars will face such comprehensive, pre-Olympic testing, U.S. drug officials said.

"There will be no differentiation between a team handball athlete and an NBA professional," said Terry Madden, chief executive officer of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

The NBA and other U.S. professional leagues are not formally covered by the World Anti-Doping code being completed at a three-day drug summit here. The code sets out uniform drug-testing rules and sanctions across all sports and countries.

Pro leagues are only "encouraged" to comply, because they aren't under the jurisdiction of international sports federations or national governments.

But pro athletes wishing to take part in the Olympics are subject to the same pre-games testing as other competitors.

"It's not anything I really have to worry about, myself," Seattle star Ray Allen said.

"The selection committee just has to consider the guys they pick on the team. They can pick anybody. You want to make sure guys are doing the right thing, especially during the season," he added.

"Due to ammo shortages, battalion wants us to use MRE brownies instead."



kevin_kilgore@hotmail.com

By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support

O'Neal with Pacers for start of trip

INDIANAPOLIS — Jermaine O'Neal joined the Indiana Pacers for the start of their four-game road trip Tuesday, three days after his stepfather was hospitalized after shooting himself.

O'Neal's stepfather, Abraham Kennedy, remained hospitalized Tuesday, but Methodist Hospital would not release his condition.

Marion County sheriff's Sgt. Claire Stipe said Kennedy sustained a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Stipe would not say whether the shooting was accidental.

O'Neal missed practice Sunday and Monday to be with his family. He was listed as probable for the Pacers' game against Golden State on Tuesday.

O'Neal is averaging a team-best 19.7 points and 10.5 rebounds for the Eastern Conference-leading Pacers.

Indiana's road trip includes games against the Los Angeles Lakers, Portland Trail Blazers and Sacramento Kings.



Photo by Pfc. Debralee P. Crankshaw

Back to the stone age...

Sgt. Chris Huffmire, Apache crew chief, Company C, 3rd Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, Fort Bragg, N.C., lifts two 35-pound concrete slabs, shaped for weight lifting, in Forward Operating Base Salerno. The weights were constructed by a previous unit, but the soldiers continue to use them in conjunction with their gym.